



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Join the Healthy SC Challenge

South Carolina is facing a health crisis. Far too many people in our state continue to make poor lifestyle choices – there are too many smokers, not enough physical activity and a lack of good nutrition. This translates into decreased quality of life for our citizens and enormous financial strain on our state and its businesses. The track we're on is clearly unsustainable. That is why Mark and I launched the Healthy SC Challenge in May – to spur counties, companies and individuals across the state to engage in friendly competition with one another to achieve healthier lifestyles.

The Healthy SC Challenge is a results-oriented initiative that will reward the county with the best overall improvements in increased physical activity and decreased BMI statistics (weight) and smoking rates. You can see where your county ranks by logging onto the Challenge's website at www.healthysc.gov. The winning county (all the residents of that county!) will be invited to celebrate at the Governor's Mansion in the spring. Our hope is to encourage collaboration and a sense of shared responsibility among counties for the greatest impact on the overall health in the state. While we don't believe that a new government program will cure what ails us, we do believe that this crisis must be addressed.

Our Progress So Far...

In the three months since the Challenge began, we've met people across the state with a contagious passion for improving health. For example, Greenville's Dr. Marcus Newberry has spearheaded initiatives to better the Upstate's health, from bridge run events to a new blog to discuss solutions for health care reform. And in Charleston, Andrea Cooper and Stephanie George are fighting childhood obesity, and Lee Moultrie is working to reduce the health disparity among the African American community.

More South Carolina businesses understand that healthier employees often means happier, more productive workers, and reduced health care costs. From South Carolina Bank and Trust's new wellness program in 14 SC cities, to William M. Bird and Company's low-fat birthday parties and incentives for healthier lifestyle choices, companies are helping their employees get fit.

Truthfully, there are far too many businesses, individuals and organizations doing good things to list them all here. The receptiveness we've met thus far has been exciting, but we recognize there is a long way to go.

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As the Challenge Continues...

As the Challenge continues and gains momentum, we'd like to see more people and groups come forward in other areas of the state and help improve the health of their communities. And we would like to see more spin-off challenges that help to further our overall goal. What if the SC House challenged the SC Senate to see which collective body could improve their health the most? What if USC challenged Clemson? Perhaps our elementary schools could challenge one another? Or maybe faith-based organizations could start a challenge to improve their "healthy temples"? The possibilities are endless.

Another important part of the Challenge is a media award for the most outstanding effort to promote the message of good health. In this area we've had some exciting results and some quite disappointing. The good news is WRDW-TV in Aiken airs our weekly tips on their morning weekend shows, and in Charleston, Channel 2 News and 102.5 radio created their own Low Country Health Challenge. Also, each week ETV Radio airs Dr. Ann Kulze reading her Healthy SC nutritional tips. Many weekly papers have also run the Challenge's tips. While we have seen some good media coverage these past three months, better coverage of weekly tips or stories that highlight healthy best practices and successes will reach far more people and do more to impact South Carolina's overall health.

You Can Get Involved!

If you haven't already gotten involved, please join us! In addition to the wealth of information on our website, you can sign up to receive weekly emails of healthy tips on nutrition, physical activity and smoking cessation. You can also learn of many great health and wellness endeavors throughout the state. Through the website, you can keep us apprised of what you're doing to encourage healthier choices. We are currently compiling information like this for a new Across South Carolina page on the website so you can access people working to improve health and wellness throughout the state. You can also call (803) 737-2325 to learn more.

Changing our focus from one based on treatment of disease to one on prevention will require commitment and perseverance. Working together, we can make a real difference in health and well-being in South Carolina, and we can lead lives rich with the blessings of good health.

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The Healthy SC Challenge is an outcome-based, cooperative effort aimed at encouraging individuals, communities and organizations across the state to show shared responsibility in developing innovative ways to improve the health of South Carolina's citizens.